



News Release

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NASA Mobile Aeronautics Education Lab Visits SPAWAR ITC

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SPAWAR ITC Public Affairs

More than 240 area schoolchildren were treated to a special field trip the first week of May when the NASA Mobile Aeronautics Education Lab (MAEL) from the John Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio came to the SPAWAR ITC.

The MAEL visit was sponsored by Lockheed Martin who also provided demonstrations and giveaways for the kids.

Classes came from NOVA Academy, Trist Middle School and P.G.T. Beauregard Middle School in St. Bernard Parish; Jefferson Elementary in Jefferson Parish, and Gregory Jr. High, Benjamin Franklin Elementary and the New Orleans Center for Science and Math from Orleans Parish. Additionally 40 children of ITC employees signed up for the after-hours time slot.

Because the lab could only hold 15 children at one time alternate experiments and demonstrations were set up for those schools who showed up with 30 kids. After an hour the kids would rotate out so that all of them could explore the lab.

The alternate activities were set up by Lockheed Martin and the UNO Engineering Department. Mr. Vernard Henley with the UNO Engineering Department Leap Program taught the students about the different aspects of engineering by using the medium of making lemonade or gumbo for tens of thousands of individuals.

Mr. Gordon Dyer, Ms. Sandra Jackson and Mr. Hale Davidson, all of Lockheed Martin, gave them demonstrations in cryogenics and rocket propulsion. Students saw the effects of extreme freezing on an oxygen filled balloon, a rose, a banana and a rubber band. The rose shattered like glass and the banana was used to drive a nail into a board once they had taken a dip in the cryogenic bath. They also saw a gas turned into a liquid and back into a gas, and they saw a thermonuclear reaction caused by two liquids which turned into a solid insulating foam when mixed. These lessons taught them about Lockheed's efforts to build a better fuel tank for the NASA space program.

The clear hit with the kids was when the engineers fired the miniature suitcase rocket. The noise and flame had them rising to their feet.

Inside the lab itself, NASA technicians Craig Frohman and Frank Witcher took the kids through a "team scenario". Kids partnered up at stations focusing on weather, global positioning satellites/amateur radio, aerodynamic design, remote sensing, aircraft design and the internet. The favorite was the virtual reality flight simulator in the rear of the lab which each child had a chance to "fly."

On the first day of the MAEL visit, area VIPs and the media came out to the lab. They included Dr. Gregory O'Brien, UNO Chancellor; Mr. Joe Bekeris, Administrative Officer for Orleans Parish School District and later in the week, Mr. Jimmy Fahrenholtz with the Orleans Parish School Board.

Many of the teachers and students expressed a desire to be invited back next year if the NASA lab returns.

NASA hopes to set up permanent aeronautic education labs in partnership cities throughout the country for the purpose of motivating students in grades five and up about careers in technology, engineering, science and mathematics.

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